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ABSTRACT

Educational television has become an increasingly important successful element in television programing. This element can be introduced in the classroom through the frequent use of videotaped theatrical skits which illustrate points made by the instructor and which have been prepared in a television studio. The skits may be classified as either stimulative, informative, or humorous. Preparation of the script for a skit should take into consideration students' interests and problems so that empathy and humor are inherent and student attention is maintained. (JM)

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THE IMPROVEMENT OF TEACHING WITH THEATRICAL DEVICES

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by FRANKLIN R. KOONTZ and PHILLIP A. SINCLAIR

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During the last five years a major new force in American television--public broadcasting--has sprung to prominence. In one of TV Guide's 1971 issues critic Cleveland Amory announced: "The 1969-70 season will go up in history for one thing--it was the year when educational television came of age."

There seems to be general agreement that this nation's publicly run "fourth network"--public broadcasting--is doing an excellent job. More than 8 out of 10 U. S. families now have television sets that can tune in on public-television stations --owned and operated by non-profit groups such as state

CS 208 196

governments, school boards, and universities. Evidence: The Forsythe Saga, The Vanishing Wilderness, Washington Week, The Ascent of Man, Sir Kenneth Clark's Civilization, and Alistair Cooke himself. Much of public broadcasting's success has been due to ridding itself of an image of stodgy content, re-runs of imperial vintage, principals long dead, an unexciting programming such as the love life of the salamander, culture in Ethiopa, and how to boil water.

It is evident that instructional television too has been changing within recent years. This is particularly true of materials prepared for use at the elementary and secondary levels where the influence of the Children's Television Workshop has been felt through the production of such highly regarded series as "The Electric Company," "Sesame Street," and more recently, "Feeling Good."

Similar developments have become apparent in television materials prepared and used in higher education. At one time it was common practice to televise and/or videotape lectures as they had been given under conventional classroom conditions in order to meet demands of heavy class enrollments. The intention was to spread the efforts of a few good faculty identified as superior instructors over large enrollment courses in general and basic content areas. More recently, the trend has been to identify courses or segments of courses which are likely to benefit most from televised treatment. The

development has resulted in reduction in quantity of programs with increased attention to improving the quality of materials produced.

The power of drama, and the power of theatricalized instruction, has been little explored in the educational world. There is little research available. What research exists discloses that "there is insufficient evidence to suggest that dramatic, or theatrical, presentations will result in more learning than will expository presentation in instructional television."[1]

And during the 1972-73 academic year there began what is a noticeable surge among Midwestern academicians: an awareness of and appreciation for theatricalized instruction in the classroom.

Instruction in the U. S., according to Dr. Edgar Dale of Ohio State University's College of Education, is still about 95% lecture-and-test. In glaring contrast is that each college student today statistically is the product of 15,000 hours of having watched television and films between kindergarten and graduation from high school. Acadmeic instruction simply is not tailoring classroom offerings to students' past audio-video training to which they're accustomed, and on which, theoretically, instructors today can capitalize handsomely.

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[1] Chu, Dodwin C. and Wilbur Schramm, Learning from Television: What the Research Says (National Association of Educational Broadcasters, Washington, D. C. 20036, 1968), p. 30.

What Professor Koontz and I are saying is there is a parallel trend in the classroom where the lecture-test syndrome is and should be replaced, partially at least, by theatricalized instruction. In short, the academic world is obliged to get more theater into the classroom. And we suggest it's done easiest by one-time acting in a TV studio and videotaped for future use.

THE BASIS FOR IMPROVEMENT

The basis for any improvement in teaching by television is one's realization, sometimes sudden, that television in general is continually wasting itself on our country's greatest natural resource: young people. By the time a child reaches college he has been pretty much robbed of the excitement and joy of learning. To compound this tragedy, instruction by television is sometimes ignored by universities and colleges. Then, further riveting the status quo is the conviction held by many academicians that the classroom should be the arena for the dignified transfer of sober knowledge. You've heard numerous starchy individuals snort: "Me entertain students? Never! I'm a teacher!"

The problem has always been this: shall we rely on degrees as evidence of ability to transfer knowledge, or, shall we require proof of effective transfer ability before we let a so-called Instructor appear before students? If the educational establishment was suddenly to require proof of ability

to transfer knowledge effectively from alleged Instructor to students, numerous professors would collapse. Others would hurriedly take diction lessons. Others would take dramatic lessons. Others would get rid of coffee-ringed, fly-specked notes. Others would become more personable, animated, entertaining, and human. Behind all the ridicule instructional television may presently be taking lies the undeniable fact that it does entertain, it is appealing, and it is educating. It must be educating.

Large manufacturers use it continuously in 30-second and 60-second bursts known as commercials--Dial soap, Kellogg's Krispies, Chevrolet. The two national political parties have and continue to use it in order to educate, if not influence the public. The Advertising Council promotes safe-keeping of the nation's forests through "Smokey the Bear." Hopefully, through his theatricalized animation, Smokey will influence the American public more effectively than a plea from some prominent individual lecturing that public. France has been and will continue to educate by television the people of its former dependency Ivory Coast. Yet, instructional television does have levels of effectiveness. Graduate students seem to prosper without it. But this level is quite specialized, and instructional television can be seen most visibly successful at the college level where motivation is not so high.

By now even the most cynical educators have begun to realize that Sesame Street and Feeling Good are not flukes, and

that they merit accolades in their own right. In Sesame Street's latest series it proves it is not only the best children's show in TV history; it also proves it is one of the best parents' shows as well. Success like this simply can't be ignored by the academic world.

Instructional television in the U. S. is not something new. Numerous universities have used it for years. But the suggestion is made they've been using it to continue the age-old lecture-test formula, not to truly educate within the potential of television. Ohio State may offer Sir William Mathey as the Instructor of Interstellar Mathematics 401 while Sir William instructs via Tel-tar from his Oxford, England office. But this continues the lecture-test formula. It has little to do with 400 students seated, slumped, asleep, and bewitched by 7 television monitors in Thompson Hall's big auditorium on the Ohio State campus.

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Let us agree for the moment that evidence does exist to prove that teaching by television is effective, the exact proof being available in numerous scholarly as well as popular publications and texts.

On that agreement, then, let us make further discoveries: ONE, what bores college kids is too much time spent on any one subject; TWO, that their basic interests are other things, such as booze, sex, food, clothing, hobbies and special interests, and then, generally last, education.

If true, then the most productive approach to learning involves use of the 30 to 60 second television period, commonly known as the commercial, quick cuts from professorial animation to live action in areas and arenas to which college and unviersity students are accustomed. In sum, the manner in which information is presented is important! Professor Koontz and I learned from our first 10-lecture series in 1972-73 that the highest ranked aspect of that series was skits, or, short theatrical scenes. So, we built the next series on this fact. But first, let me show you results of our first series, a 10-lecture series for Business Communications 706-102 first presented in the spring of 1972:

STUDENTS SHOW PREFERENCE FOR SKITS

We learned several things from measurement of this course. FIRST, the highest ranked aspect of this series was skits, or, short theatrical scenes:

1. Skits (the Rowan & Martin "in-&-out" technique)	3.522
2. Visuals	3.494
3. Content	3.484
4. Development	3.428
5. Summary	3.370
6. Lecture rating	3.353
7. Introduction	3.300
8. Hold attention	3.321
9. Length of lecture	3.255
10. Speed of delivery	3.250
11. Participation	3.179

SECOND, we learned there was about a 10 percent difference, in favor of television instruction, in test averages. Mean scores of tests and statistical analysis during 1972-73 involving 246 students, 14 sections of such students, over 5 quarters, confirm this difference:

	TEST AVERAGES all 5 tests, 15 questions drawn from television lectures	TEST AVERAGES all 5 tests, 30 questions drawn from course text
Spring quarter, 1972	74	64
Fall quarter, 1972	75	66
Winter quarter, 1973	73	63
Spring quarter, 1973	75	64
Fall quarter, 1973	71	64
AVERAGES, all sections (14), 246 students, 5 quarters		
Television questions (1-15)	73+	
Text questions (16-45)		64+

Empirical evidence tends to confirm the effectiveness of (1) short periods of instruction, and (2) instruction by theatricalized television. In sum, there was about a 10% difference in test averages, in favor of theatricalized instruction by television, over instruction by lecture, text, and classroom discussion. If so, then, is it possible to look with favor on theatricalized instruction helping to make an individual Instructor a better, more effective Instructor?

These theatrical skits, some of which you will see shortly are based on the conviction that students learn best in short bursts of information transfer. This is far different than the traditional lecture-test formula. It also calls for a diversified personality in front of any class, one that depends on its ability to transmit knowledge, not on degrees and past learning records. This is what Dorothy Heathcote, eminent British educator at the University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, means when she says: "The future development of teaching lies within an Instructor's own resources, nothing less."

HOW TO BUILD A SCRIPT

Now how do you go about writing such a script? Well, take one of your brightest and best 50-minute lectures and meet with your college's or university's TV producer-director. In concert you arrive at major conclusions. You will have already divided your lecture into logical portions: the introduction,

presentation of your major points, complete with support material and a summary or conclusion. Certain areas will lend themselves to theatricalization.

Whether you're instructing students at the junior college level or students at a baccalaureate college, your audience is composed of people 18 to 22 years of age. They may or may not be married. They are of varying degrees of maturity, but they're all interested in the same things: booze, sex, food, clothing, special interests such as hobbies, and, finally, education. Therefore, you'll probably build concepts into situations that students can identify with easily: pants shops, fast food shops, ski shops, record shops, beer parlors, beaches, sports spectacles, restaurants, automobiles, hot rod races, and plenty of rock music.

Inherent in your script must be empathy. You look at these students and you see a bunch of youngsters who want their problems solved. You try to do it, knowing you can do little about defective, penniless parents, and wretched home lives. Nonetheless, your script is trying to solve problems. Your audience has considerable conflict in its life. You're trying to bring each individual in your audience into the integrated society we all want. This is done in your script where you show kindness and respect. Dialects and ridicule, looking down at ethnic groups, and scripts written above students' heads--are out. What your script is trying to do is

increase a student's sense of himself, to expand his imagination and capacity, to ram home the principals you want him to retain while he's relaxed and thrilling to your words and action. Although it's almost impossible to measure retention, you hope your beautiful material is retained so a student's behavior is changed and he expands his capacity. Said theatrically, you're trying to build great theater, and great theater is simply influence that never stops.

To do this, I suppose, you present positive benefits resulting from the principles and concepts you're offering. To this extent, your script may be dishonest. It frequently may present only the positive, not the negative. Nonetheless, the positive quality in your script is a way to self-respect. Your script and your resulting television presentation is a more dynamic way of dispelling doubt, the chief characteristic of the society in which we all live.

Now, if you buy the doubt characteristic of our present society, you should consider the opposite to doubt, which is: no doubt, or laughter, or humor. You can use humor to great advantage. You can use ridicule and satire. You can use wit and corn. You can use even the flash of a smile, small as it may be.

Let me show you now the ___-second open common to all 4 presentations, followed by the first skit which shows how humor was built into one presentation ...

* *

FIRST ..
(AT THIS POINT SHOW THE STANDARD ___-SECOND OPEN COMMON TO ALL PRESENTATIONS. FOLLOW THIS IMMEDIATELY WITH THIS SKIT ...)

SECOND ..
"ENVIRONMENTAL MARKETING," PART I

Theatrical Skit No. 5, pg. 13 of original script

TYPE . . . . . Humorous (the "grapejuice-and-sugar" joke)
LENGTH . . . . . 1 min. 10 secs.

* *

Another way of classifying your material is to divide it arbitrarily into two parts. One is where you lecture, or simulate Walter Cronkite. The other is a theatrical skit or skits. Professor Koontz and I arbitrarily decided to divide each of our 35-minute presentations into 1/3 theatrical effects, and 2/3 narration from the Instructor. We also decided to limit these presentations to 35-minutes owing to the fatigue and attention factors, as well as did we want the remaining 15 minutes for test purposes.

You probably will want to reserve the complicated, tough portions of your lecture for yourself. Here is where you call on all your charm, eyeball motion, arm movements, voice inflections, and magnetism. Especially do you rise to oratorical heights when you deliver interim and final summaries. Do strive to avoid interference with the real message by inserting barks from an old-time klaxon to signal new points. Do strive to avoid misplaced, or non-relevant, doubtful humor. Dependent on your interpretation this line can be sophisticated, or it can be

repellent: "Now, students, you're probably up to your asterisks in notes." Humor, one of the least explored areas in teaching, is often treacherous. So is satire. One of Professor Koontz' and my more vigorous bouts over the script concerned one of Lenny Bruce's top laugh-getters. I wanted Becky to answer the store telephone like this:

BECKY . . . (ANSWERING TELEPHONE) HELLO. JED'S GENERAL STORE. BECKY SPEAKING ...

(PAUSE)

YOU SAY YOU WANT TO BUY SOME ALLIGATOR SHOES?

(PAUSE)

SIR--SIR, JUST A MINUTE! WHAT SIZE ARE YOUR ALLIGATOR'S FEET?

Koontz won this one; the joke was knocked out of the script.

HOW TO WRITE THE SCRIPT

You're now faced with writing it. You string words together on paper just as you string words together orally for delivery before a class. But you probably will want to, first, write in the present tense to create urgency and immediacy. Second, write it in the 3rd person for objectivity and in the 1st and 2nd person for warmth and vigor. Dialog especially will go into the first and second persons. Third, avoid or minimize all adjectives and adverbs. They only clutter and cloy. Fourth, hold your sentences to 12 to 17 words. Fifth, use the 18-year old idiom in dialog. Sixth, use plenty of conversational style

phrases and human interaction through dialog. Seventh, your television producer-director will instruct you in typing the script for studio use.

HOW ACTORS WERE CAST

Now that you've seen the first skit let me comment on the characters. Professor Koontz and I visualized the set in terms of the script and relevancy to our audience. We decided on a small-town grocery store set with modern characters would be best. We did consider a set duplicating a pants store, a set using ski equipment, and a record store. But the script's content called loudly for a grocery store locale. Together we visualized the characters after the set had been laid out by our art staff. In casting Professor Koontz wanted an actor for the principal role of Jed with the proper mix of informality and authority. He felt this character should come on as a father figure, mature, even-handed, jovial, gruff perhaps, but warm and vigorous. Professor Koontz wanted this central figure to be sufficiently strong so the two lesser characters would contrast sharply, and they do. Rick comes on at times as a harum-scarum youth, full of zest and that vigor the audience can associate with. Becky was cast as a sweet, wide-eyed, open-hearted heroine, and both she and Rick play their roles with irrepressibly high spirit. All actors in these presentations are theater or speech majors at the University of Toledo.

In the skits you're about to see, notice the continuity

of the grocery store set. This is common to all theatricalized skits in the four 35-minute presentations built for a course titled: Principles of Marketing 706-137. The two subjects these tapes cover are recently developed marketing phenomenon. They're titled: Environmental Marketing, Parts I & II, and Positioning, Parts I & II. These subjects are so recent they haven't yet been incorporated into texts, so we bring students up-to-date with these supplemental videotaped presentations. Continuity is important: (1) the same actors appear in all 4 presentations, (2) the same props are used, and (3) the actors remain in character continuously. This promotes believability, and perhaps as important, helps hold down costs. There's JED, a middle-aged grocer, RICK, a modern youth enrolled in college, and BECKY, a young woman employed by JED and perhaps enamored of RICK. Costs incurred in production of these presentations were defrayed by a Faculty Research grant from the University of Toledo.

THREE TYPES SKITS

For easy development of skits you may want to classify them as stimulative, informative, and humorous. Let me show you one of each type. In the first type, stimulative, it poses a problem or a question. After that viewers are taken step-by-step to a solution. The title, stimulative, indicates its action. It is designed to be thought-provoking. Whereas the narrator/professor

normally is the Walter Cronkite of the presentation with expository delivery, in the stimulative type skit actors carry the burden of instructing. Professor Koontz and I strove for an alternative to a professor's firm exposition in this type skit. This stimulative skit carried by JED and RICK, they engage in explaining elasticity. They do it with analogy, by chart, with common words and products. Here it is ...

* *

THIRD:
"ENVIRONMENTAL MARKETING," PART I

Theatrical Skit No. 2, pg. 7 of original script

TYPE .....Stimulative (elasticity/gasoline/peaches skit)
LENGTH.....4 minutes, 45 seconds

* *

The second type skit is one that informs, the informative skit. It's just that--it informs principally through exposition. Here's such a skit carried by JED and BECKY where they set forth and illustrate 3 categories of movement off shelves in grocery stores ...

* *

FOURTH:
"ENVIRONMENTAL MARKETING," PART I

Theatrical Skit No. 3, pg. 9 of original script

TYPE ..... Informative (3 categories of movement skit)
LENGTH..... 2 mins. 40 secs.

* *

The third type, humorous, is quite evident throughout the presentations. Professor Koontz and I were careful to avoid

the schmaltz of the beer parlor and the comic strip. Scripts call for no special costumes; the nearest to costuming lies in the standard grocery store jackets you see characters wearing. We avoided off-color jokes, raw, spicy allusions, and any suggestiveness. No double-entendres of questionable nature. We sought to avoid possible accusations of burlesque, although in the previous 10-lecture series filmed in 1972, we did come close to burlesque. And we would burlesque a scene if it were applicable. However, in this present series we sought essentially a planned quality of firm reassurance and realization. We did seek to incorporate the quality of imaginative entertainment, shocking as this admission may be to some people. With this quality of imaginative entertainment we sought from students, as the poet Coleridge once said, "the willing suspension of disbelief." In this attitude of willingness to believe, we then ram home important knowledge. Now let's look at a humorous skit. In it Rick and Becky thrill to the possibility of making money, having learned their lessons well ...

* *

FIFTH:
"ENVIRONMENTAL MARKETING," PART I

Theatrical Skit No. 6, pg. 18 of original script

TYPE ..... Humorous ("Jed's Juice" scene)
LENGTH ..... 1 min. 15 secs.

* *

Then there is a part the Instructor plays in these presentations. He's Walter Cronkite. In the scene you're about to see

he summarizes what's gone on, perhaps one of several such summaries, and then the presentation winds up. Here it is ...

* *

SIXTH:
"ENVIRONMENTAL MARKETING," PART I

Theatrical Skit No. ___, Conclusion by Narrator/Sinclair, pg. 32 of shooting script ..

SINCLAIR . . . AT THIS POINT LET'S SUMMARIZE THE PREVIOUS MATERIAL. YOU MAY WANT TO CHECK YOUR NOTES TO MAKE SURE YOU'VE RECORDED THE PRINCIPAL POINTS ...

(LET FILM ROLL. KEEP FILM GOING UNTIL END OF PRESENTATION SHOWING CREDITS, FULL SIGN-OFF WITH MUSIC, etc., etc.)

* *

If you're at a college or university similar to the one Bud Koontz and I enjoy, your theatricalized presentations will follow the first law of show business: <u>the greater the hit, the more damning the criticism</u>. One obvious result will be your colleagues' complete ignorance of your efforts. Another critical comment is bound to be: "I'll be darned if I want any unsalaried machine replacing me in the classroom!" Another fear will be: "But what if the Dean doesn't like it?" Still a fourth: "Amateurish! It'll never replace a real, live professional teacher!"

This is true. Bud Koontz and I are the first to acknowledge that TV has a huge role to play in the classroom. But we also know that the television monitor in front of the class can never

replace a loving teacher who cares about young people and who diligently strives for a lively classroom full of learning devices, zip and zing, and impact.

I suppose all faculty members are faced with the fact that a few individuals, such as yourselves, dare to make changes, but not fundamental changes. Any faculty's major objective is to maintain things just as they are.

SUMMARY

Through these techniques we believe information transferred from monitor to students is more direct, has greater impact, and lasts longer. All of this is in pursuit of changing student behavior, education's maximum objective.

There is a special quality within students at a commuter college such as The University of Toledo. These students take on urban overtones of schizophrenia. One personality admits, perhaps grudgingly, the need for study and acquisition of further knowledge. But the other personality resists. Therefore, not only does a dichotomy exist, but a struggle between the two personalities goes on constantly. The Instructor must recognize this.

These students find themselves chained to an 8-hour-a-day job. They are held there unceasingly by increasing inflation, parental and family demands, a heavy tax bite--to say nothing of study demands if they carry a full load of academic endeavor. In short, they tend to live narrow, hectic lives. They tend to become separated from the exciting world whirling about them, attracted

to it as they probably are. Their acceptance of television instruction, in Koontz/ and my opinions, is due not only to childhood exposure to it, not only to the excitement and color of the real world they view through television, but essentially because they sense television as a sixth sense. It becomes an escape route from the mundane, limited world in which they live.

Well, with that you see that skits are most meaningful when they illustrate points the Instructor is trying to make. Television instruction, particularly with theatricalized skits, is a tool that tends to make and Instructor a better Instructor. We do believe this is a way of increasing whatever affection students may presently hold for the classroom. And can we prove that students anticipate these theatricalized efforts? That they actually prefer such instruction over lecture-and-test? Well, hopefully we'll be able to do that following this present series.

Television has yet to come into its own in the classrooms of this country. Theatricalized instruction of students has only begun.